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ABSTRACT

A corporation's image is a powerful persuasive tool for reaching external publics such as competitors, regulators, and prospective employees. Corporations should avoid disparities between the actual and the desired image, as well as disparities between the external perception and the internal perception of employees. A course was developed at California State University, Hayward, in which students use cases to analyze communication strategies in the construction, maintenance, and change of a corporate image. Students begin by choosing a company for scrutiny. Reports focus on identification of problems with image as well as suggestions for correction. Students are assigned to groups to practice critical skills necessary for the assignments. Business cards are analyzed for effectiveness along with annual reports, advertisements, and promotions materials. Next the students investigate internal publics via samples of internal communication. In-class presentations, guest lecturers from industry, on-site tours, and problem solving sessions lead to final reports. Students report that the attention to analysis helps them to be more attentive to detail and the persuasive nature of business communications. (An appendix includes the course description, course syllabus, course assignment descriptions, and sample evaluation forms for the oral reports.) (HB)

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CORPORATE IMAGING: TEACHING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR REACHING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PUBLICS

A Paper to ABC West
San Diego Regional Conference
April 1992

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A corporation's image is a powerful persuasive tool for reaching external publics such as competitors, regulators, community groups, suppliers, and prospective employees. When a disparity exists between the actual and desired image, a corporation must make changes in order to remain competitive. Similarly, when a disparity exists between the external public perception and that of the internal public, most notably employees, the corporation is likely to experience morale problems.

I teach an upper division Marketing course in which students use cases to analyze communication strategies in the construction, maintenance, and change of a corporate image. Students identify specific instances of strengths in corporate identity and develop solutions to problems in perception, consistency, and adaptation to various publics. In this paper, I will present the plan for the course and discuss examples of student projects. A complete course outline, including descriptions of papers and reading assignments, is included in the Appendix.

Students begin the image analysis process by selecting a company for scrutiny. It may be a profit or non-profit organization by which they are employed or that they find to be of interest because of a relationship as a consumer, supplier, or observer. Four short reports are assigned to allow students to compare the company chosen for analysis to others as well as to examine the artifacts of communication which are generated. The main focus of each report is the suggestion of correction; when students identify a problem or an inconsistency they must offer a remedy.

In order to test the application of theory from the readings to a practical case, in class exercises precede each report. I assign students to groups so that they may practice the critical skills necessary to complete each report. The groups meet, complete the exercise and then reconvene as a class for discussion. By reviewing each group's analysis of a problem, students learn new ways for resolving issues in image inconsistency which they may then use when preparing their individual written reports.

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During the first class meeting, I begin the in class exercises by assigning students to groups of four to five members and giving each group six business cards. The task is to rank order the cards by their effectiveness at representing the business which they are intended to advertise. After all groups have completed the ranking (approx. 20 - 30 mins.), we discuss the reasons for effectiveness as a class. This practice session prepares students for their first report which requires them to collect five business cards, assess the effectiveness of each at presenting an accurate image to the desired public, and finally to redesign the least effective card. A card from the business chosen for the Final Written Report must be one of the five analyzed. This first assignment allows students to compare the manner in which a variety of businesses attract a client base.

From the initial introduction to a company by a business card, students further investigate the company's focus on both internal and external publics by an examination of an Annual Report. For the in class practice session, we analyze the current university catalog. Since students comprise one of the university's internal publics, they have a particular advantage of personal experience to determine effectiveness of appeals. With the model of the analysis of the catalog, students then scrutinize an Annual Report and identify areas that have been omitted as well as suggest changes in style, format, and content to improve the corporation's image.

The Annual Report is a company's presentation of itself to both internal and external publics. Advertising and promotions, however, reach an even greater audience. Since students are consumers of the various forms of advertising and promotions already, the in class practice exercise offers another approach. Rather than design an ad campaign, I ask the groups to identify a harmful product (such as cigarettes) or behavior (such as gang membership) and develop an ad campaign to demarket it. In groups, students decide a message, media placement and method for evaluation of that appropriately placed message to their target market. The corresponding written report requires a comparative analysis of three samples of external communication; one generated by the business (such as a print ad), one generated by an outside source (such as news coverage describing, complimenting or condemning a company action or policy), and one of a promotional nature (such as corporate sponsorship of an event). Students examine the three artifacts for consistency and develop a view of the company's regard for its external publics.

With a clear view of the outside, students turn their attention to the internal publics. Since they comprise one of the university's internal publics, we examine student outreach

postering in class to sharpen the skills at comparative analysis. Then students collect two samples of internal communication and evaluate each not only for effectiveness at delivering a message to a desired public, but also with attention to consistency between the company's desired and actual image and its differing regard for external publics.

At mid-quarter, students report their progress to the class. With the four interim reports and the majority of the reading completed, students have the skills to outline a strategy for analysis of a specific company. They present their plan, including deadlines for goals, to the class. This ten to fifteen minute presentation allows students to speak in front of the room after having the practice of speaking to their groups. As such it prepares them for the final oral report at the end of the quarter.

The remaining in class exercise presets students with a challenging problem. During Fall 1991, we discussed Magic Johnson's announcement that he was HIV positive. Students defined his image, the image the he gave to corporations for which he did advertising and the range in possibilities of corporate response to his announcement.

Guest speakers from industry, on site tours of local businesses, and problem solving sessions rounded out the remainder of the quarter. During final exam week, students gave presentations to the class from their final reports. Most students chose their current employers as the subject for their reports and as such offered fascinating insider perspectives. In general, students reported that the attention to analysis made them more attentive to detail and the persuasive nature of communication.

APPENDIX

MARKETING 4415: Internal/External Relations Management
Fall 1991

Section 01 meets MWF, Noon-1:10 p.m., AE 285

Instructor: Joan M. Gaulard
Office Hours: MW 10:30 - 11:50 and by appointment
RO 244, x4174 (message machine)
Marketing Department: MB 2087, x4146

Required Text: Norman A. Hart, Effective Corporate Relations: Applying Public Relations in Business and Industry (London: McGraw-Hill, 1987).

Assignments:

In class exercises	10%
Interim reports (four reports; 10% each)	40%
Oral report of progress	10%
Final written report	30%
Oral presentation of report	10%

Assignments are due on the dates provided on the COURSE SYLLABUS. All work is to be typed or word processed (letter quality), double spaced, on 81/2 x 11" paper. Please be sure to make a copy and keep it for your files. Late work will be reduced by one fraction of a grade for each calendar day

Please see me to discuss approaches to the assignments, review drafts, or prepare materials.

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4415 -COURSE SYLLABUS

SEPTEMBER
25 (W) Introductions
Setting corporate goals

27 (F) Targeting audiences
DUE: Introduction, Chapter 1

30 (M) Message cues
Documents
DUE: Chapters 2,3

OCTOBER
2 (W) DUE: Interim report #1

4 (F) Case analysis -CSUH

7 (M) Annual reports
DUE: Chapter 4

11 (F) External image analysis
DUE: Chapter 6

14 (M) DUE: Interim report #2

16 (W) News coverage

18 (F) Public relations
DUE: Chapter 11

21 (M)
23 (W) DUE: Oral reports
25 (F)

28 (M) Advertising
30 (W) DUE: Chapter 9

NOVEMBER
1 (F) Industry perception
DUE: Chapter 8

4 (M) DUE: Interim report #3

6 (W) Corporate sponsorship
8 (F) DUE: Chapter 10

11 (M) HOLIDAY -campus closed

13 (W) Corporate responsibility
15 (F) DUE: Chapter 13

18 (M) Internal culture
DUE: Chapter 5

20 (W) Interviewing
Hiring/Promotion policies

22 (F) Corporate person
DUE: Interim report #4

25 (M) Case analysis and
27 (W) report preparation

29 (F) HOLIDAY-campus closed

DECEMBER
2 (M) DUE: Final written reports
4 (W) DUE: Oral presentations
11 (W)

EXAM WEEK - On December 11, class meets from Noon - 1:50 p.m.; I will hold office hours from 2 -3 p.m. There is no class meeting on December 9; office hours will be from 10 -11 a.m.

4415 - ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

In Class Exercises 10%

We will complete five exercises (2% each) in class to apply various principles to practical situations. These exercises are designed as an opportunity to practice using information that will be needed in the interim, mid-quarter, and final reports. You earn the points if you participate. Since these exercises involve group discussion, there is no opportunity to make up these assignments if you miss class.

Interim Reports 40%

Four reports (10% each) are required.

General Requirements:

1. Two to three pages long (500 - 750 words)
2. Apply material from the text and lectures to the specific purpose
3. Use report format
4. Summarize, analyze, and suggest corrections
5. You may use samples from any corporation, but you might find it best to try to collect materials from the business that you will analyze in your final report.

Report #1

1. Collect five business cards (include with your report).
2. Compare the effectiveness of the cards at presenting an accurate image to the intended public.
3. Provide reasons for your selection of the best card.
4. Redesign the card which is weakest.

Report #2

1. Obtain an Annual Report.
2. What is the intended corporate image.
3. How does the report address competitors, employees, stockholders, consumers, government agencies
4. Has information be omitted.
5. Suggest changes that would improve the appeal of the Annual Report to a specific public.

Report #3

1. Collect three samples of external communication. News stories, press releases, promotional materials, and ads would serve the purpose. Include these samples with your report.
2. Consider design, media placement, outreach, and message to evaluate the effectiveness of the information in securing the corporation's image.
3. What would you change.

Report #4

1. Obtain two samples of internal communication such as memos or newsletters (include with your report).
2. Is the internal communication style of the corporation consistent with the external style.
3. Is the corporate image consistent
4. If inconsistencies occur, who would your resolve them.

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Oral Report of Progress 10%

Present the following information to the class in ten to fifteen minutes:

1. Company background
2. Your reason for selecting this business
3. Target publics
4. Communication strategies for target publics
5. Success of strategies at image construction or maintenance
6. Identify goals for completion of the report

Final Written Report

Select a company to investigate for your report. You may consider your current employer, a corporation for which you would like to work (profit or non profit), a company that has received recent coverage in the news, a new business, or any other interesting company. Using long report form, address the following requirements in 10 to 15 pages:

1. Describe this company, including your reasons for choosing it.
2. Determine the product
3. Assess the various publics which this business targets
4. Identify the communication strategies for reaching each of these groups. Are these strategies effective?
5. What is this corporation's image
6. Is the behavior consistent with the image
7. Is the internal images the same as the external image
8. What is this company's greatest strength
9. What is the greatest problem? How would you solve it.

Oral Presentation of Report 10%

Present the major findings of your written report to the class in 15 to 20 minutes. Be prepared to address questions.

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MARKETING 4415

Oral Report - Mid Quarter Progress

Company Profile

1. Company background	1	2	3	4	5
2. Reasons for Choice	1	2	3	4	5
3. Target Publics	1	2	3	4	5
4. Communication Strategies	1	2	3	4	5
5. Image Construct/Maintenance	1	2	3	4	5
6. Completion Goals					

Report Format/Presentation

1. Organization	1	2	3	4	5
2. Transitions	1	2	3	4	5
3. Audience Adaptation	1	2	3	4	5
4. Eye Contact	1	2	3	4	5
5. Volume	1	2	3	4	5
6. Language Use	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Grade:

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MARKETING 4415

Final Oral Report

Summary of Findings from Final Report

1. Company Profile	1	2	3	4	5
2. Product Identification	1	2	3	4	5
3. Assessment of Publics	1	2	3	4	5
4. Strategy Effectiveness	1	2	3	4	5
5. Corporate Image	1	2	3	4	5
6. Behavior and Image	1	2	3	4	5
7. Internal\External Image	1	2	3	4	5
8. Strength	1	2	3	4	5
9. Problem\Solution	1	2	3	4	5

Report Format\Presentation

1. Oraganization	1	2	3	4	5
2. Transitions	1	2	3	4	5
3. Audience Adaptation	1	2	3	4	5
4. Eye Contact	1	2	3	4	5
5. Volume	1	2	3	4	5
6. Language Use	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Grade:

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